



A Rake's Vow (Cynster Novels)

By Stephanie Laurens

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He vowed he'd never marry.

To Vane Cynster, Bellamy Hall seems like the perfect place to temporarily hide from London's husband hunters. But when he encounters irresistible Patience Debbington, Vane realises he's met his match ...

She vowed no man would catch her.

Patience isn't about to succumb to Vane's sensuous propositions. Yes, his kisses leave her dizzy and his caresses made her melt; but Patience has promised herself she'll never become vulnerable to a broken heart. Is this one vow that was meant to be broken?

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

To this second book of her Bar Cynster series, Stephanie Laurens brings a thorough command of Regency style, as well as graphic, uninhibited love scenes. Elegant, commanding Vane Cynster graciously bows to fate when he seeks shelter from a storm and meets the woman he realizes he's destined to marry--Patience Debbington, the spinster niece of Vane's kindhearted godmother. Although her attraction to Vane is immediate and electrifying, Patience distrusts "elegant gentlemen" like her father, who broke her mother's heart by failing to return her love. To pursue Patience, Vane settles into his godmother's household, which consists of various poor relatives and assorted hangers-on, and is caught up in the search for a petty thief and occasional "Spectre" who is harassing them. It requires all of Vane's investigative abilities to catch the criminal, and all of his considerable powers of persuasion--as well as many ardent couplings with Patience--to convince her that family, loyalty, and love come first for him. Laurens is especially skillful at capturing Regency males, aristocrats whose refined restraint barely masks their powerful underlying urges. Appearances by others of the extended, devoted Cynster family ensures that readers will become increasingly attached to this ongoing series. --*Ellen Edwards*

About the Author

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Stephanie Laurens began writing as an escape from the dry world of professional science, a hobby that quickly became a career. Her novels set in Regency England have captivated readers around the globe, making her one of the romance world's most beloved and popular authors.

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October 1819

Northamptonshire

"You want to get a move on. Looks like the Hounds of Hell are on our heels."

"What?" Jerked from uneasy contemplation, Vane Cynster lifted his gaze from his leader's ears and glanced around, bringing Duggan, his groom, into view--along with the bank of lowering thunderheads sweeping down on them from behind. "Blast!" Vane looked forward and flicked the reins. The pair of matched greys harnessed to his curricule stepped out powerfully. He glanced over his shoulder. "Think we can outrun it?"

Considering the storm clouds, Duggan shook his head. "We got three miles on it, maybe five. Not enough to turn back to Kettering, nor yet to make Northampton."

Vane swore. It wasn't the thought of a drenching that exercised his mind. Desperation dug in its spurs; his eyes on the road as the greys swept on, he searched for some option, some route of escape.

Only minutes before, he'd been thinking of Devil, Duke of St. Ives, his cousin, boyhood companion, and closest friend--and of the wife fate had handed him. Honoria, now Duchess of St. Ives. She who had ordered Vane and the other four as-yet-unmarried members of the Bar Cynster not only to pay for but attend the dedication service for the roof of the church in Somersham village, close by the ducal seat. Admittedly, the money she'd decreed they surrender had been ill-gotten gains, their winnings from a wager of which neither

she nor their mothers had approved. The ageold adage that the only women Cynster males need be wary of were Cynster wives still held true for this generation as it had for those past. The reason why was not something any male Cynster liked to dwell on.

Which was why he felt such a driving need to get out of the path of the storm. Fate, in the guise of a storm, had arranged for Honoria and Devil to meet, in circumstances that had all but ensured their subsequent marriage. Vane wasn't about to take unnecessary chances.

"Bellamy Hall." He clung to the idea like a drowning man. "Minnie will give us shelter."

"That's a thought." Duggan sounded more hopeful. "The turnoff should be close."

It was around the next bend; Vane took the turn at speed, then cursed and slowed his cattle. The narrow lane was not as well surfaced as the road they'd left. Too fond of his high-stepping horses to risk injuring them, he concentrated, easing them along as fast as he dared, grimly conscious of the deepening gloom of an unnatural, too-early twilight and the rising whine of the wind.

He'd left Sornersham Place, Devil's principal residence, soon after luncheon, having spent the morning at church, at the dedication service for the roof he and his cousins had paid for. Intending to visit friends near Leamington, he'd left Devil to enjoy his wife and son and headed west. He'd expected to reach Northampton and the comfort of the Blue Angel with ease. Instead, thanks to fate, he would be spending the night with Minnie and her inmates.

At least he would be safe.

Through the hedges to their left, Vane glimpsed distant water, leaden grey beneath the darkening sky. The River Nene, which meant Bellamy Hall was close; it stood on a long, sloping rise looking down on the river.

It had been years since he'd visited--he couldn't offhand remember how many, but of his welcome he had not a doubt. Araminta, Lady Bellamy, eccentric relict of a wealthy man, was his godmother. Unblessed with children, Minnie had never treated him as a child; over the years, she'd become a good friend. A sometimes too-shrewd friend uninhibited in her lectures, but a friend nonetheless.

Daughter of a viscount, Minnie had been born to a place in the *ton*. After her husband, Sir Humphrey Bellamy, died, she'd retired from socializing, preferring to remain at Bellamy Hall, presiding over a varying household of impecunious, relatives and worthy charity cases.

Once, when he'd asked why she surrounded herself with such hangers-on, Minnie had replied that, at her age, human nature was her main source of entertainment. Sir Humphrey had left her wealthy enough to stand the nonsense, and Bellamy Hall, grotesquely gargantuan, was large enough to house her odd *menage*. As a sop to sanity, she and her companion, Mrs. Timms, indulged in the occasional bolt to the capital, leaving the rest of the household in Northamptonshire. Vane always called on Minnie whenever she was in town.

Gothic turrets rose out of the trees ahead, then brick gateposts appeared, the heavy wrought-iron gates left ajar. With a grimly satisfied smile, Vane turned his horses through; they'd beaten the storm-fate had not caught him napping. He set the greys trotting down the straight drive. Huge bushes crowded close, shivering in the wind; ancient trees shrouded the gravel in shifting shadows.

Dark and somber, its multitude of windows, dull in the encroaching gloom, watching like so many flat eyes, Bellamy Hall filled the end of the tunnel-like drive. A sprawling Gothic monstrosity, with countless architectural elements added cheek by jowl, all recently embellished with Georgian lavishness, it ought to

have looked hideous, yet, in the overgrown park with the circular courtyard before it, the Hall managed to escape outright ugliness.

It was, Vane thought, as he swept about the courtyard and headed for the stables, a suitably esoteric dwelling for an eccentric old woman and her odd household. As he rounded the side of the house, he saw no sign of life.

There was, however, activity in the stables, grooms hurriedly settling horses in preparation for the storm. Leaving Duggan and Minnie's stableman, Grisham, to deal with the greys. . .

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Flora Young:

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